

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
MEETING WITH INTERAGENCY PERSONNEL
GUANTANAMO, CUBA
AUGUST 22, 1994

Secretary Perry: I'd like to get some feelings from you, if I may, about the operation. You can see the physical layout and things like that, but in particular, whether the educational/recreational programs are catching on here, what the attitude and morale of the people in the camps is, how much longer the camp can continue to function before it starts to come apart at the seams because of morale problems. How many NGOs are here, how they're working with the military. A whole host of questions like that, and anybody that cares to comment on those, I'd be interested in hearing your viewpoint.

Voice: Sir, CRS [Community Relations Service - Dept. of Justice] has education programs. Our team leader for education is here. This is Mike Wilson. I'll let him speak as to the education programs, what they consist of.

Mike Wilson: Currently, the assessment is we're outrunning [inaudible] the education program led by, taught by the Haitians themselves, fortified through [inaudible]. Each camp is currently carrying a level of about 300 children. As we get [inaudible].

Secretary Perry: What's the participation by the Haitians? Is it something that they welcome, they fully participate in?

Mike Wilson: When we began the programs, what you saw was a tremendous interest. Part of that interest came from Western [inaudible]. As we showed the [inaudible] and education, some of that has dropped off, and we were left with people truly interested in educating their children and sharing what they had. Currently, we probably have anywhere from 50 to 25 teachers per camp. That's for 300 children.

Secretary Perry: Where do you get the Creole speakers?

Mike Wilson: It's Haitians teaching Haitians. Most of the CRS are Creole teachers.

Voice: In your screening then, you're able to identify which of the Haitians are qualified to do this, are interested in doing this?

Mike Wilson: We spent probably anywhere from three to five meetings per camp, not so much screening them--they are screening themselves. We have identified leaders through the JTF and we go to them. It's a filtering process.

Secretary Perry: What about the recreation program? Do you want to comment about what is being done, what can be done in that area?

Voice: We do have recreation programs in. We have the equipment such as dominos, soccer balls, some basketball hoops in some camps. We could use more.

With regard to education we could use pens and pencils, for example. We're running low on pens and pencils. We can use all the recreational equipment we can get, quite frankly.

Secretary Perry: How do you go about requesting that, and who responds to the request? How do you put pressure on the system in that regard?

Voice: We are requesting through your forces, and they have been very responsive. Also through the NGOs that are here on the ground.

Secretary Perry: Which NGOs are here?

Voice: World Relief, we have an agreement with World Relief. We provide assistance, especially in the public health sector. We also bring in 12 Creole-speaking public health nurses who can improve the communication between the military personnel and the Haitian camp population.

Secretary Perry: Which nations are participating in this part of the operation for the NGOs? Are there organized efforts from other nations working here?

Voice: We have World Relief, which is an American NGO; and of course, [inaudible].

Secretary Perry: How about Canadians? French Canadians?

Voice: Among the units there are teams, there are also Canadian personnel. We have a mixed staff. But only one American NGO right now.

Secretary Perry: One of the things I'm particularly concerned with--not just what we're doing here--but what lessons we're learning here that would be useful to us as we try and set up the Cuban camps...

Voice: First of all, sir, I think we learned an enormous amount from the last time we had Haitians here. We avoided a lot of mistakes this time. Density is a lesson, that I think initially we were over-confident of the number of people we can put in any given area. The pressure of not having any space at all is tremendous, and it leads to quick frustration and low flash points. Second is, we've had lots of logistics lessons--the distribution of food. Everything takes longer than you think it's going to take. Those kinds of things are lessons that I suppose one relearns all the time over and over again. But I think given the magnitude of the flow of people we had in the short period of time, we had the right people here--the civilian agencies, DOS, Department of Justice, CRS, UNHCR were on-site when the first migrants arrived and that made all the difference. That's a lesson that we need to apply with the Cubans. And, as well, the early introduction of NGOs with the resources and expertise they bring in the cultural areas that the various migrants are from really makes a difference. We could have used NGOs earlier here, quite frankly.

Secretary Perry: What's going on in the camps in the way of establishing self-governance? Leadership organizations? Do we encourage that?

Voice: Yes, sir. We sure do. The camps have taken their own spin on that. Every camp has a self-governing organization and a counsel. Some camps have tent leaders--someone from each tent--and they represent groups and the groups are pyramided. Others have a more horizontal organization with a camp leader and then people he leads. But every camp has a governmental organization that reflects the personality, really, of the people in the camp. Some, quite frankly, are more effective than others. We've had leaders voted out of office already. We've had several non-violent coups and replaced people who were camp leaders with other people. So we do encourage it, and it's extremely helpful when the Haitians can feel like they own a part of it and are much more apt to take care of it. The cleanliness in the camps and the sanitation in the camps is a thousand percent better since the Haitians developed some kind of a governmental organization.

Secretary Perry: How do the Haitians, and the leadership among the Haitians, relate to UNHCR?

Voice: We have regular meetings with camp leaders. Every day we go into a different camp, [inaudible]. We discuss with the senior camp leaders their concerns. One aspect which might play a role in the future because we have more Cubans coming in. The Haitians are very, very sensitive to different treatment towards Cubans. And there were rumors in the camps, and I think everybody is quite aware of the danger of these rumors. Just today we had a meeting where they pointed out to us if the Cubans are treated differently then there will be violence at the camps. That's certainly one additional aspect we have to take into account.

Secretary Perry: Of course you know, in fact, we will be making every effort to treat them equally. And the issue then becomes a communication problem, how we get that message across. The Cubans probably aren't so anxious to hear that message, but the Haitians are very anxious to hear that message.

Voice: We do have regular meetings. We have another radio station in place, they have the radios also. We have a newspaper. So I think there is a lot of potential for improvement in the communications sector.

Secretary Perry: There is one very important difference between Haitians and Cubans. Haitians, we have a relief valve, we can offer to take them back. And if they accept, we can take them back. The Cubans, we don't have that same potential, at least at this stage. In time that will become a very important [inaudible].

Voice: It sure will. Several thousand Haitians have decided, for a variety of reasons, I'm sure, not to stay here any more.

Secretary Perry: When we flew from Key West to here today, we flew out over the Florida Straits in the area where the Coast Guard cutters and Navy ships are picking up the rafts, and it's a stunning sight. Just in the little area we looked at, I counted 20 different rafts floating out there, not counting the people who were on the cutters who had already been picked up. So there's a tidal wave of people forming out there that are going to be coming into this camp in a matter of a few days.

Voice: ...At 1400 local today they'd picked up 1257 [inaudible].

Secretary Perry: Without question, this is going to be a new record. These are people who, I would believe, left Cuba on Saturday, I guess. It's taking about two days to get out to the area where they're being picked up.

Voice: I think the potential exists among the Cubans, certainly at least the first arrivals, to be dissatisfied quicker. Many of the ones that came in early, early this morning did not know when they left Cuba that the policy had changed. In fact several had indicated they weren't going to leave the cutter this morning when it docked. They did, and were very doubtful, but it was 3 o'clock in the morning. So I think the security issues with the Cubans are going to rise to the top faster than they did with the Haitians.

Secretary Perry: Are there any specific advice, recommendations, comments, you want to make to me about things which the Defense Department might to do differently to facilitate the operation down here?

Voice: I was just wondering why Cubans are being brought to Cuba, to Guantanamo Bay? Being so close to Castro.

Secretary Perry: It was because it was the only available place to bring them. We have gotten an agreement from the Panamanian government to make Panama available as a safehaven for them, but that's when the new Panamanian government comes into office, which is not until 1 September. So we're a couple of weeks away from having that facility. We have two other facilities which are being developed--one at TCI and one at Suriname, but that will be 2,500 people max each, and neither one is ready yet.

Voice: Are you considering those more for Cubans than...

Secretary Perry: We're still open to thinking about that. We have to work that problem.

Voice: The only piece of advice I would offer is we will need to be extremely careful if we are offering Cubans safehavens before Haitians, because that signal will be received by the Haitians very strongly.

Secretary Perry: That message has gotten to us. And the inter-agency considerations of how to work with moving people from here to safehavens, that will be a primary factor.

The other factor we have to somehow take into account is that there is a relief valve for the Haitians and we can send them back to Haiti. There is a greater

possibility of a change in the situation in Haiti in the weeks or months ahead. Whereas for the Cubans here, if you try to explain to them what's their prospect for a change in situation, it's very hard to offer any kind of hope or optimism. Or any alternative.

Voice: In the short term, what's going to be important to Cubans is--for those people that are here--that relatives in the United States know they're safe. That's a process we're starting to put in place. We've been inundated with phone calls today from the Miami area. I was out there before, and all I want to do is notify my grandmother, notify this person or that person. That's all they're concerned about right now, short time. And if some communication with the Haitians and the Cubans can be developed, I think that will relieve some of the pressure that's going to build up real quick with Cubans. That macho, hot blood is going to come forth if these people are not [inaudible], especially with family. They are very close. Something's going to have to be done with that.

Secretary Perry: But in sum, the short answer to why did we bring them here: we didn't have any alternative except leaving them out to drift into the Florida Straits and drown. We didn't have any other place to take them. We can't take them back to Cuba without forcibly entering Cuba. The Cuban government's not ready to receive them. Taking them to the United States created a magnet effect, which is going to aggravate what is already a flood of refugees coming in. I sat in all the meetings where this was agonized over. And the answer is that we didn't find any [inaudible] attractive as this alternative is, all the other alternatives were even more unattractive.

Voice: Let me speak for the [inaudible]. I think we would like it very much if there's a nation-to-nation [inaudible] very quickly to Guantanamo. That could be useful, particularly a great help for [inaudible] relief.

Voice: A lot of the relief organizations are trying to get donations to the area, but they don't have the money to do it. And there's a problem within the Transportation Command--who's going to pay for the transportation costs. I haven't been able to get an answer. That's one of the things I think would help the situation.

Secretary Perry: Transportation from where?

Voice: From the States.

Secretary Perry: Anywhere in the States?

Voice: Jacksonville, Gulfport, some of the bigger ports.

Secretary Perry: Where have the goods been consolidated for moving?

Voice: They're asking right now where to send them.

Voice: We've been talking about it. Some of the NGOs have substantial resources to bring to bear on this. And in most cases they're willing, at least in World Relief's case, they're willing to pay the cost to a port of embarkation somewhere. What needs to be settled, and we're working it right now, is how do we pay to package the goods at the port, transport them over here...

Voice: ...Navy ships [inaudible].

Voice: Yes, sir. Navy ships can do some, barges can do some. So that stuff is coming. But quite frankly, as I said, our priorities have been shifted back to tents and cots, and portable toilets for Cubans, so it's sort of pushed away some of the quality of life things that we want to do for the Haitians. We'll get there, but it's going to take a little bit longer.

Secretary Perry: In terms of getting the authority to move the relief supplies for NGOs. We can give that authority. It's a matter of organizing to do it right. The priority of NGO supplies versus tents.

Voice: In the long term, we probably ought to look at streamlining that because that's a substantial resource that we can mobilize much quicker if we have a more streamlined way to do that than the normal wickets that we're having to travel through.

Secretary Perry: I just came a few weeks ago from Rwanda where we have similar questions there. We have organized and coordinated very well with the NGOs and the UNHCR there in getting, in using the U.S. airlift to get supplies in for the NGOs, including flying some of the NGOs in that didn't have any other way of getting there. So there's a tremendous synergistic potential between what the military is doing and what the NGOs are doing. Our job is to find a way of getting maximum utility out of the things we can provide uniquely to this problem, which of course, is primarily the lift.

Thank you all very much.

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